



A submission to the Disability Action Plan consultation

Disability and Youth Transitions project

Disability and Youth Transitions (<https://disabilityandyouthtransitions.co.uk/>) is an ESRC-funded, 30-month project (January 2023-June 2025), exploring the experiences of disabled young people as they move towards adulthood, in Glasgow and its surrounding areas and in the North East of England.

Through this research, we are working to understand more about all aspects of disabled young people's lives during this crucial period – including education and training, their housing situation, employment and volunteering, health and social care, social lives and relationships – exploring what works and what does not work in supporting disabled young people. We are doing this by talking with disabled young people over time about their experiences; using creative techniques such as photography to enable them to represent their experiences; talking with their families and advocacy groups about their experiences of supporting disabled young people; and bringing disabled young people together to identify differences and similarities in their experiences. The latter is important in the context of this research project, which cuts across Scotland and England as well as across different local authority areas, which means the experiences of the disabled young people taking part may be quite different depending on where they live, not least because many of these policy areas are devolved.

Our academic project team consists of Professor Janice McLaughlin, Professor Tracy Shildrick, Dr Katie Salmon and Amanda Bailey (Newcastle University); Dr Charlotte Pearson, Professor Nick Watson and Dr Jane Cullingworth (University of Glasgow); and Dr Edmund Coleman-Fountain (University of York). Several team members have a long track record of researching disabled young people's lives.

The project's work is informed and strengthened by an expert advisory group, chaired by Disability North and including representatives from Glasgow Disability Alliance, ARC Scotland (Scottish Transitions Forum), Children North East and Investing in Children. Most importantly, disabled young people are involved as partners in both sites and across the lifetime of the project, to shape how we undertake all parts of this research, including the analysis and dissemination of its findings.

This submission is made on behalf of the project's academic team, and relates to **Question 9a** on the **wellbeing and opportunities of disabled children**.

Question 9a on the wellbeing and opportunities of disabled children

We strongly welcome the Disability Unit's proposal to establish a task force to improve the wellbeing and opportunities of disabled children, and for this task force to have cross-Government reach.

We also firmly support the proposal for 'transitions to adulthood' to be a first area of focus for this taskforce. We further agree that all of the other proposed areas of focus (accessibility of public spaces and transport; bullying, personal safety and impact on wellbeing; and early identification of need and support for families) are very important, not least because they can also play a critical role in the transition to adulthood for many disabled young people. One issue already coming through from our early data and analysis is the 'legacy' implications of poor experiences of support in these areas in childhood as disabled young people move towards adulthood, creating low (although perhaps realistic) expectations of the support they will receive, how appropriate it will be and what difference it could make to their life chances.

The early findings of our research also indicate that the suggested aim of the taskforce – ‘*to improve the way Government services for disabled children work together*’ – is vital, as the current lack of a co-ordinated or holistic approach to supporting the transition to adulthood for disabled young people is a significant challenge.

However, our research indicates that this applies not only to services that are delivered by, or the direct responsibility of, central Government – but equally to services planned and delivered at a local or subnational level (e.g., social care, healthcare and housing). **We would therefore urge the task force to look at how services for disabled young people can be better co-ordinated across all levels of Government.** This seems of particular importance at the local government level where significant, long-term and ongoing budgetary constraints have seen local authorities make severe cuts to areas such as children’s services and youth provision, as well as reducing funding to third sector organisations that work with disabled young people.¹

We also strongly recommend that the task force explores the ‘Principles of Good Transitions’ developed following extensive consultation with stakeholders (including disabled young people) by the Scottish Transitions Forum, with the aim of providing ‘a framework to inform, structure and encourage the continual improvement of support for young people with additional needs between the ages of 14 and 25 who are making the transition to young adult life’.²

This work identified the following, seven overarching ‘Principles of Good Transitions’ ‘*that can be used by professionals from all sectors, the Scottish Government and national bodies*’:

1. Planning and decision making should be carried out in a person-centred way
2. Support should be co-ordinated across all services
3. Planning should start early and continue up to age 25
4. All young people should get the support they need
5. Young people, parents and carers must have access to the information they need
6. Families and carers need support
7. A continued focus on transitions across Scotland

This work has since been further developed – again following extensive stakeholder consultation and rolled out with the involvement of disabled young people’s groups – with the publication of the ‘Principles into Practice’ framework by the Scottish Transitions Forum/ARC Scotland, which is intended ‘*to embed the Principles of Good Transitions into policy, planning and practice*’.³ The framework was successfully piloted in ten local authority areas in Scotland between 2020-2023⁴ before being officially ‘launched’ in June 2023, with all local authority areas in Scotland now being encouraged to adopt the Principles of Good Transitions and associated framework.

Importantly, the Scottish Government has very recently confirmed that it will draw upon the key learning from the Principles into Practice pilots and the Principles of Good Transitions as it develops its proposed National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Disabled Young People.⁵

To support this work, ARC Scotland (which co-ordinates the Scottish Transitions Forum) has also launched Compass, a new online tool for disabled young people, their parents and carers, and the professionals who support them with the transition to young adult life – to provide a one-stop source of personalised information and guidance tailored to each young person’s needs and interests.⁶

¹ See, for example, Pro Bono Economics (2023) *The well-worn path: Children’s services spending 2010-11 to 2021-22*: <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/the-well-worn-path-childrens-services-spending-2010-11-to-2021-22> and National Youth Agency and YMCA (2021): *Time’s Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people*: <https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Times-Running-Out-v6.pdf>

² Scottish Transitions Forum (2019) *Principles of Good Transitions 3*: <https://scottishtransitions.org.uk/7-principles-of-good-transitions/>

³ ARC Scotland and Scottish Transitions Forum, *Principles into Practice*: <https://www.pn2p.scot/>

⁴ ARC Scotland, Scottish Transitions Forum and Scottish Government (2023) *Principles into Practice Impact Report*: https://www.pn2p.scot/wp-content/uploads/ARC_PIP_ImpactReport_Public_250518.pdf

⁵ Scottish Government (2023) *Transitions to adulthood strategy: statement of intent* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/statement-intent/>

⁶ ARC Scotland (2023) *Compass*: <https://compasslaunch.scot/>

This comprehensive, joined-up and person-centred approach to planning/supporting the transition to adulthood for disabled young people recognises the importance of supporting every aspect of a disabled young person's life. We believe this type of holistic, consultative approach, which involves disabled young people at each stage, could and should be replicated in England, however – as in Scotland – to be meaningful, this would require properly-resourced support services and leadership to also be in place.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our research project and its findings as they emerge with the Disability Unit and/or the cross-Government task force, once it has been established.

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